DECLASSIFIED (131) R

TWO SPEECHES BY GEORGE F. KENNAN

1. How New Are Our Problems?

2. The National Interest of the United States.

Series 3, No. 46

March 1, 1951

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY ZITCHKE DATE 1/7/83
RDS or XDS EXEMPT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS
DECLASSIFIED RELEASABLE
RELEASE DENIED
PA or FOI EXEMP. ON

External Research Staff
Office of Intelligence Research
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DECLASSIFIED

FOREWORD

Copies of these two speeches were obtained by the External Research Staff and have been reproduced for distribution to interested officers.

For further information, contact Mr. Kirkpatrick or Mr. Penniman, Code 191, Extension 5492.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

HOW [illegible] ARE OUR PROBLEMS?

First address by George Kennan
at Centennial Conference at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
January 29, 1951, 4:00 p.m.

Whoever has occasion to occupy himself for any length of time with the formulation of American national polity — with policy, that is, which affects the major collective interests of our people — becomes aware sooner or later and in one degree or another, depending on his knowledge and his interest in history, that a wide area of the problems with which he is dealing consists of old and well worn territory, studded with the historic relics and monuments of others who have been there before him, who have wandered around in the same mazes and thickets, have plotted out the same land-marks and hazards, have opened up, or tried to open up the same roads and vistas. Everywhere the contemporary statesman moves within this area of policy formulation he finds a little inscription on everything which says: Kilroy — Kilroy the statesman, Kilroy the historian, Kilroy the policy maker — was here.

The remaining area in which the contemporary statesman has to move is really unchartered territory. He views this territory much as the first explorers, standing the hill tops of our mountain ranges, must have viewed the great empty valleys stretching out below them. Here all was silence and mystery — and perhaps danger. Here they had no one to help them and nothing to rely on but their own wits and skill and courage.

Many people who occupy themselves today, in one way or another, with questions of national policy, and above all, foreign affairs, make no effort to distinguish between these areas. They have little interest in history and no belief in it. They are either impervious to the evidences that other men were there before them or they assume that the quaintness and crudeness of the relics mean that those men who left them were less clever and less sophisticated than they themselves and that there would be nothing to learn from them.

This is a dangerous mistake. In that area in which history repeats itself or produces at least comparable or familiar phenomena, we have a tremendous fund of human wisdom to draw upon; and the fact that the wording may be cumbersome to our ears, or the imagery unfamiliar, does not alter the fact that a lot of people have thought very hard about human affairs for a long time, and may have done a lot of work that we need not repeat.

. . . . . .

Now the sum total of the problems of American civilization at this moment is so tremendous that I can assure you we will be lucky

DECLASSIFIED

enough if we succeed in coping creditably with them even if we draw to the full on the credit balance of experience and wisdom which the great figures of the past have left to us, and confine our own intellectual efforts primarily to the areas in which our problems are really and genuinely new. But for this reason we have to have some way of knowing where to find the high water-mark of the old and the familiar, and of identifying that further area in which we are really on our own. It is that problem to which I am addressing myself this afternoon.

In the first place, suppose we ask ourselves: has anything changed in human beings? Is the human animal in any significant way different from what he has been throughout the past history of civilization?

This is of course a question for the anthropologists and the historical scientists. It is my impression that they answer it in the negative. I know of no evidence of any important change in man himself since the days of the classical cultures. There is no reason to believe that his intellectual or artistic capacities have undergone any significant change over what they used to be. And as far as his moral nature is concerned -- let's remember that the cruelties which have been perpetrated within our own memories have been on a vaster scale, in absolute terms, than anything known for centuries back. This should not necessarily be taken to mean that things are getting worse. It probably only indicates that in this respect, as in others, man's capabilities have faithfully adjusted themselves to technological improvements and possibilities. But it also does not mean that things are getting any better.

It is hard to believe, then, that man himself has undergone any significant change. This is not to say that he behaves precisely as he has behaved in the past. The environmental stimuli which work upon him, and to which he responds, are different, in important respects, from those which he has known in the past; and that makes for differences in response. But I think we are entitled to believe that if -- let us say by way of an experiment -- an appreciable portion of our population could be again subjected to the stimuli with which Americans of say a century ago were familiar, their reactions would be substantially the same.

So we discard the thesis that the change has been in man himself. Has it not, then, been perhaps in his physical environment? Has the world changed -- the natural world in which it is given to men to live?

Again, the answer is no, not appreciably. We hear talk to the effect that there has been a slight warming of the world's climate in recent decades, but that is hardly significant. It is true that man has continued, in historic times to devastate and exhaust the planet on which it was given to him to live. He has stripped it of a considerable part of its natural vegetation and cover. He has

DECLASSIFIED

exhausted its soil, plundered its mineral resources, depressed its water tables, polluted and silted its rivers. But it was a big world and bountiful; the movements of the winds, the rhythm of climate, and the scope of its natural processes — the evaporation of the seas and their return in the form of rainfall, the great mystery of plant and animal growth independent of man's doing — the scope of all these processes has been so tremendous that man's effect on them has not yet been overwhelming. Man has disfigured the earth and marred its surface. But the oceans still purify the filth that washes into them from the teeming continents, the rains still fall and cleanse and irrigate, seeds still germinate, and the great earth still yields crops of plant and animal life great enough, if rationally exploited and distributed, to feed and clothe the entire human race as it has been known in the past.

If, then, the newness of our age lies neither in man himself nor in the natural environment with which he is surrounded, where does it lie? I would suggest that it lies in three things: first, in the greater numerousness of the human species; second in the tools which man has in his hands, for good and evil; and third, in the changing relationship between man and man, that is, in the requirements for the organization of society, implicit in the complicatedness of modern industrial and urban civilization.

Now first of all this question of population. I don't need to tell you that there has been a revolution since the founding of our republic in the numbers of the world population. You will hear more about this, I understand, next month. But I'd like to try to remind you how striking and significant this change is. Civilized life, as you will recall, has been taking place on this planet for several thousand years. The population of the world was approximately 660,000,000 in 1750. A hundred years ago, by 1851, it had risen to something more nearly 1,000,000,000. Today, in 1951, it is estimated at over 2,200,000,000. If we can imagine for a moment that there are men on the planet of Mars who are able to observe our planet with telescopes just so powerful that individual men are revealed only as tiny microbes, or their presence is perhaps only indicated by the evidences of what they are doing to the surface of the earth — and if we stretch our imaginations so far as to assume that these observers up in Mars are people of great longevity, whose sense of time is quite different from ours and who are capable of watching the progress of things on this earth in terms of centuries rather than years — then I can see the telescopic watchers running back to their bosses and reporting rather excitedly, just at this juncture: "Say, something strange is going on in that earth down there; these little microbes have suddenly begun to multiply at the most tremendous rate. There must have been some sudden alteration in the balance of nature on the place."

We stand, therefore, in the midst of a new and quite startling phenomenon in the history of human life; and its connotations for us are far-reaching. First of all, throughout our experience as a nation, up to the beginning of this century at any rate, we were always con-

DECLASSIFIED

scious of the fact that there were still habitable and inviting areas of the world either quite unpopulated, or populated so thinly and by people in so helpless a state of backwardness, that they represented ample fields for the flow of American private activity. The existence of such areas was an important feature on our national horizon. There was always some place in the offing where you could contemplate going if life was too confining where you were, if you were in trouble, or if you were just bored and wanted adventure. In this way, all American life had sort of a safety valve to it, and the pressure never got too high.

Furthermore, nowhere on the globe, one or two hundred years ago, was population so dense that it had passed beyond a reasonable relationship to the resources, especially food resources, of the particular territory which it inhabited. Peoples were vulnerable, in the old days, to epidemics and to occasional famines produced by staggering crop failures or particularly devastating wars or disorders. But you always knew that you had only to wait for the epidemic or the war to run its course, or for another season to come. The earth was there, and there was enough of it. Somehow or other, a living would be scratched out again.

Today large portions of the earth have reached so severe a state of overpopulation that they survive only by making themselves workshops and exchanging their products for food and raw materials. These peoples are primarily the insular ones or the ones whose homes are situated along the shores of the oceans, primarily in the north temperate zone. They happen to be (or perhaps it is something more than happenstance) the mercantile and rational-minded peoples, whose traditions and psychology are at least somewhat similar to our own, and whose survival, as we shall see presently, is important to us for both political and strategic reasons.

Strangely enough, these overpopulated "workshop" areas, despite their tremendous economic vulnerability and the shocks they have received during the recent wars, have managed, with our help, to keep going and to maintain a vigorous civilization. But there are other areas which are in an even worse way. Those are the ones which are both backward industrially and overpopulated. They are ridden, to a large extent, by traditional prejudices and behavior patterns which weigh heavily on their ability even to approach the solution to their problems by increasing productivity. And actually, as things stand today, there is no evidence that increased productivity alone would have more than a temporary palliative effect. Because population is pressing constantly, in these countries, against the ceilings set by food supply and public hygiene, and fertility is such that population will readily fill any area opened up to it by a raising of that ceiling. The only answer would seem to lie in some artificial limitation of births; and most of these peoples, whether rightly or wrongly, are so far from that that we can dismiss the possibility entirely from this discussion.

DECLASSIFIED

No one can speak with any certainty about these matters; and there are tremendous exceptions to anything you can say about them. There are no problems more baffling and elusive than these questions of the relationship of population to food supply and other fundamental conditions. What I am about to say to you now will probably be vigorously and emphatically challenged by the people who are coming here next month for the second part of this Centennial celebration and who know much more than I do about these things. But it is my impression that there are large and significant portions of the earth where the combination of all these conditions has created a highly unsatisfactory, and even tragic, state of affairs -- characterized by immense restlessness and bewilderment. As things stand today, I think we must adjust ourselves to the prospect that a large segment of the world's population, in terms of numbers, is destined to continue to live in a state of bitter competition for possession of inadequate resources; that this is going to continue to produce reactions which will not be happy ones and which are bound to seem unnatural to us and to place limitations on the degree of intimacy that we can hope to achieve between ourselves and themselves. This dilemma, I reiterate, is so profound, and exists on so vast a scale, that no one, either here or elsewhere, has yet suggested any material answers to it, as far as I know, which are more than the most tentative palliatives. I am not saying that there are no answers, or that the peoples themselves will not find them. Such answers may exist, and they may even lie on a plane other than the material one. But it does not seem to me that we have those answers. And not having them, I think we must be very careful what we say and do, and above all not give the impression that we have.

This is the essence of one of our great problems of foreign affairs, namely our relations with the peoples whose lives are marked by a technical backwardness and a material proverty as striking as our technical advance and our material abundance. We should not underrate the depth of this problem. It is never easy for a rich man to talk to a poor man and carry conviction. We should therefore be extremely careful what we say to the peoples who are materially less well-endowed; and should be careful to talk to them in terms of their problems and aspirations -- not our own.

The second thing I mentioned as having changed was the nature of the tools in man's hands. I would say unhesitatingly that the most important of these changed and changing tools are the ones we call weapons. And you may be surprised to hear me say that I think the most important change has not been in the tools for international war, where the atomic bomb is involved, but in the tools of internal police power: the weapons by which the authority of government can be enforced over its subjects. Modern tools and weapons have greatly increased the ease with which despotic power can be maintained, and have accordingly enlarged the area which can be despotically ruled from a single center.

DECLASSIFIED

If you review the history of Europe since the Middle Ages you will see that the area over which a single political power could be successfully radiated and maintained has grown in direct proportion to the efficiency of weapons. It has grown from the castle of the medieval robber baron, and the walled city which often grew up around or near it, to the principality, to the small kingdom, thence to the national state, and thence to the super-state which we saw in Hitler's empire and in the Soviet empire of today. But the greatest changes have come in the past hundred years, with the industrial revolution and with changes in communications and transportation. Up to a hundred years ago the weapons which were decisive in enforcing the power of government were largely those which a single man could carry, could own, could conceal in his home. Numbers of men, and the spirit by which they were animated, were therefore the great criteria of military and political power. With the advent of the machine, of telegraphy and of new means of transportation, all this changed. The individual man cannot own a tank or a radio network or a railroad or an atomic bomb, much less the workshops which make these things. And with the things he does and can own he cannot fight successfully against those who control these more elaborate and complicated facilities. There was a time when a revolt against despotism was possible if you could get together enough peasants with pitchforks and maces. Those days have past. If today you have people unscrupulous enough and determined enough to use modern technology as a strait jacket for enslaving great masses of other people, if they are successful in slipping the strait jacket on to those people in the beginning, and if they are ruthless and unbending in their maintenance of it, they can get away with it as long as they can agree among themselves. Their only real danger lies in these relationships among themselves -- in the problem of maintaining unity and harmony within their own group, and in the still more difficult problem of making the choices necessary to replenish their own ranks as death or human frailty takes their toll of the original members.

I do not mean to say that the only significance of the changes in weapons has been in the realm of police power. These changes have done things with respect to international warfare which are also highly significant for our international relations. I suspect that they have increased, temporarily at least, the relative independence and effectiveness of land power over that of sea power and have left the maritime-minded peoples who inhabit the Atlantic edges of the great Eurasian land mass in a vulnerable and dangerous position vis-a-vis the land power minded peoples of the interior. With the aid of modern technology it is now possible to move and supply land forces over a greater distance from their industrial-political base than was the case in past centuries.

As long as there were various major centers of land power on the continents of Europe and Asia, and a reasonable balance was preserved between them, this change in the military realities did not impinge itself strongly on the consciousness and interests of people in this

country. Germany and Japan, whether we know it or not, and whether we liked it or not, were really partly our defenses. But with the destruction of the military capacities in Germany and Japan, and with the requirement placed on Japan that she should remove her forces entirely from the mainland, vacuums were created which brought Russian communist power or dominant influence to within a few miles of the shores of the Atlantic, to the Adriatic in Southern Europe and to the entire area of China.

Now this fact has a very special importance for the United States. It is not just that it is Russian power which has broken through to the oceans; but it is continental land power, with all that that implies. Our foreign relations have been concerned largely, throughout the history of our republic, with areas to the south and east of our country which belonged to or were dominated by the mercantile tendencies in our civilization — in the sense that throughout all of them private interests were outstandingly important, whether by virtue of economic theory or of corruption and inefficiency, or both. It is true that we also had dealings with England and the countries of continental Europe, which represented powers with real armies and navies and with a disciplined sense of national or dynastic interest. But their economic life was primarily mercantile in nature; and once the Revolution and the War of 1812 were over, and as long as we kept out of their political affairs, we did not have to learn what it was to deal with that disciplined, purposeful and militarized side of their nature. Throughout the nineteenth century our foreign policy developed in an idyllic world where our main task was the defense of the private interests of individual American citizen in his private activities abroad. It was only in World War I that we really came up against the problem of dealing with the collected and centralized military effort of a modern industrial nation. And even then our contact with it was fleeting. It did not remain a permanent problem for us. We were able to back off from it and leave to others, as we then thought, the responsibility for dealing with it as a permanent problem.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

Now sea power -- mercantile power -- is traditionally different from land power. It is more humane, more tempered, less drastic and less final in its objectives. The wars of sea-power do not leave that trail of devastation atrocity and bitterness which is left by the wars of land neighbors. The sea-powers have aimed, for the most part at relative improvement of position; at driving a better bargain with the adversary, not at destroying him. And what is particularly important for us: the maritime powers (the Spain of olden times perhaps excepted) have been generally ones animated by the same rational-liberal concepts as ourselves -- business-minded people, people who understood the function of private initiative and activity, and who were prepared to let Americans function privately with relation to territories under their control. Land power -- especially Russian and Asiatic land power -- has generally had less understanding for international trade and private business. It has tended to hug its conquests jealously and timorously to itself, barring all outside private activity, monopolizing the economic process and exploiting it for political ends.

The significance of World War II and its results lies in the fact that large areas of the earth which were formerly available for the private activities of American citizens -- whether they might be business or travel or study or the propagation of the gospel -- are now closed to us in that sense; and instead of being able to deal with individuals or local authorities or private firms on those territories we can deal only with a powerful central authority. For where that philosophy of government enters in, the individual ceases to have any function for himself; he becomes the instrument of a higher political will.

To deal with the collective disciplined power made possible by modern technology and inspired by the older land power habits of thought is a new and baffling experience for this country. Regimes of this sort are generally hostile and offensive in their dealings with the outside world. It is part of their stock-in-trade. They cannot be dealt with successfully by individual Americans or by individual American firms or even organizations. To be influenced in ways that protect and further American interests. They must be dealt with by something that represents the collective, integrated and disciplined power of our own people. Even the United States Government can deal with them successfully only insofar as it answers to that description. Everything that hampers its power of decision and its power of the disposition of American energies and resources -- all such things as the checks and balances of the Constitution, the power of lobbies and interest groups, the unwieldiness of governmental-bureaucracy, and the lack of inner-governmental discipline and disciplinary control over private activities -- all these things reduce the effectiveness of government in dealing with the new form of power which we have before us.

We find our noses being rubbed constantly into the dilemma which rises from these circumstances -- the fact that he who would cope effectively with modern land power in its totalitarian form must make himself similar to it in many respects. He must learn to regiment his people, to husband his resources,

DECLASSIFIED

to guard against hostile agents in his midst, to maintain formidable armed forces in peace time, to preserve secrecy about governmental decisions, to wield the weapons of bluff and to wage war in peacetime -- and peace in wartime. Can these things be done without the selling of the national soul? Is the price being asked of us for survival, the price of all those things in which we thought ourselves distinguished -- and favorably distinguished -- from other peoples and other times exorbitant? History offers us no answer to this question; for here -- in the greater expanse of territory controlled by the grim and sullen forces of modern despotism -- we have a problem that is really new.

Finally, the third thing that is new. I described it initally as a change in the requirements for organization of society, implicit in the complicatedness of modern industrial and urban civilization. That is doubtless a poor description and one on which the social scientists could perhaps improve in exactness by using their own lingo. What I have in mind is this. We Americans are the children of the rational-liberal philosophy of political affairs and of the free enterprise system, which is so intimately connected with it. Our philosophy seems to be predicted on the assumption that man is capable of comprehending his relationship to his environment, of analyzing it rationally; that he is capable of coming up with judgments, expressed in his actions as a citizen and primarily in his voting, which will reflect these interests; and that the sum total of these enlightened expressions of self-interest will be a faithful expression of the interest of the body politic at large, in other words, or national interest.

I can see how strongly this concept could commend itself to people who lived in an age where economic processes and social relationships were simple, and their elements fairly clear to each individual. In Jefferson's day, there was nothing frightfully complicated for the average small rural property owner either in the political and economic organization of society or in the relationship of himself and his enterprise to this social context. The elements of this relationship were all visible to him. No wonder, then, that people were mastered by the belief that the problems of society were comprehensible and susceptible of rational answer: and that the individual citizen would be able to provide this rational answer.

While this, again, is dangerous terrain, it is safe to say that society in our day is vastly more complicated in all its processes, and that the relationship of the average individual to his social context is much less readily apparent than it was. Let us put it this way. Whereas at one time the individual citizen swam in a relatively narrow stream, the banks of which were clearly visible to him, and could therefore measure easily his progress and position, today he is borne on vast expanses, where too often the limits are not visible to him at all, and where he is incapable, with such subjective criteria of judgment as he possesses, to measure the rate and the direction of the currents by which he is being borne. It does not take a specialist -- God forbid -- but takes an exceptionally well-educated,

travelled and thoughtful generalist ever to make a stab at gauging the deeper trends of development in our confused American society.

It is perhaps significant that concomitantly with this growth of complexity in every field, we have had the emergence of powerful trends of thought about various areas of human affairs which deny that individual man is capable of seeing very clearly the nature of his own problems or of doing anything very effective about them by rational deduction. They see man rather as a being primarily influenced in his patterns of behavior, by forces that he does not see and does not understand, and not likely to arrive individually and by rational process at any very accurate analysis of his troubles. The Marxist philosophy, for example, sees in his social behavior, for the most part, the helpless and unconscious expression of the class-interests and the relationships of production by which the life of his time is dominated. The whole impact of modern psychology seems to lie in the belief that man's emotional nature and behavior are dominated not by the things of which he is aware but by the things of which he is not aware. And this tremendous phenomenon of American advertising stands in reality, when you stop to think of it, in a curious relationship to the philosophic foundations of American society; for it, too, reiterates and demonstrates daily in a thousand forms the thesis that man's choices in all the things that go to make up his material existence are influenced by almost every sort of reaction except the direct and rational one. And the most characteristic thing about this is that the advertisers themselves are blissfully unconscious, I am sure, of the deeper significance of this implication.

It is, as you will see, only a step from these reflections to the conclusion that man's freedom is not as useful to him as we have traditionally thought; that the rational approach to society only creates vacuums in which it is dangerous for the individual to live. The English scholar, Isiah Berlin, described this state of mind very brilliantly in an article which appeared last year in our American periodical FOREIGN AFFAIRS. The paternalistic state, he said, generally anxious to reduce destitution and disease and inequality, determined "to penetrate all the neglected nooks and crannies of life which may stand in need of its justice and its bounty", found it necessary to "narrow the area within which the individual may commit blunders, and to curtail his liberties in the interest of his welfare or of his sanity, his health and his security, his freedom from want and fear."

This concept, my friends, is not a wholly unreasonable one, as you can see; at least, a certain case can be made for it. But it skirts along the edge of precipices startlingly dangerous to our traditional caste of thought, and dangerous to more than that: for at the bottom of those precipices lies the greatest of political dangers. It is only one short and almost logical step from these ideas to the mental world of Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor, the most eloquent prophet and exponent of the rationale of modern totalitarianism. And we would do well to remember the terrible challenge in the Inquisitor's words:

DECLASSIFIED

"I tell thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature was born...We shall persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us...Freedom, free thought and science, will lead them into such straits and will bring them face to face with such marvels and insoluble mysteries, that some of them the fierce and rebellious, will destroy themselves. Others, rebellious, but weak, will destroy one another, while the rest, weak and unhappy, will crawl fawning to our feet and whine to us: 'Yes, you were right, you alone possess His mystery, and we come back to you, save us from ourselves."

Here, my friends, we have the warning of our danger, and the measure of the depth of the dilemma of modern man whose world sometimes seems to be getting too complex for his individual comprehension. I do not mean to try to suggest solutions for it today. But I want to point out to you that the ancient conflict of freedom and authority has taken on new forms in this day and age, and ones which assail some of the very foundations of our political and social philosophy. Our national myth is being challenged by our national reality. The world is aware of this, and will not readily forget it. In the nineteenth century we could face the outside world with an exuberant confidence in the reckless and hurried vitality of our own society. Nothing more was needed. Today, with the growth of our population and of the world's population, with the grim implications of modern weapons, and with the increasing complexity of life, let us admit it: we are confronted with a great national uncertainty — with something which remains to be fought out, clarified and resolved before we can hope that our pre-eminence in the spiritual and social fields could match our pre-eminence in the field of material values.

Does this have implications for foreign policy? I think it has, and deep ones. But they would take us beyond the scope of this discussion this afternoon. We may return to them tomorrow.

DECLASSIFIED

[redacted]

THE NATIONAL INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES

An address by George F. Kennan at the first Centennial Conference of Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., January 30, at 8:00 P.M.

Tonight, as we conclude this celebration of one hundred years of the functioning of Northwestern University, it was felt right that we should turn our thoughts to that something which we picture to ourselves by the phrase: "national interest". I say that "something" because this is one of those things that you know must exist -- you can demonstrate it by the process of exclusion -- but it is too vast, too rich in meaning, too many-sided, for any positive definition. And for that reason, I'm going to ask your indulgence if I try to make it clearer for us tonight by talking -- not about what it is -- but about what it is not.

You know: concepts and ideas are sometimes like shy wild animals; you can never get near enough to touch them and make exact measurements of them, but you can round them up and gradually pen them in; you can mark out certain directions in which they are not permitted to move; and in this way you can confine them from time to time and have some idea of what they are like.

And so, tonight, I would like to take this idea of national interest and try to box it in a little by telling you of three things that I think it is not. And the first of these would be this: the interest of the United States in international affairs is not a detached interest in our international environment for its own sake, independent of our own aspirations and problems here at home. It does not signify things we would like to see happen in the outside world primarily for the sake of the outside world -- just because we feel altruistic or ashamed of our relative wealth or sorry for other people or are attached to some abstraction or other. It's something that begins at home. It is a function of our duty to ourselves in our domestic problems.

Why is this? It's because we do not live just for our relations with others -- we do not live just in order to conduct foreign policy. It would be more correct to say that we conduct foreign policy in order to live -- but again not just "to live-period." -- not just to live in the sense of waiting, individually, for death to come to us, but to live as a people, joined together in a social compact, for a purpose related primarily to ourselves and not to others.

It is not an expression of national selfishness to say that our first duty, as a nation, is to ourselves. It is an expression of self-respect. You all know how odious, in individual life, the sloppy person who neglects his own affairs and his own [illegible] and runs around in a cloud of loose talk and unfulfilled [illegible]ions and at the same time busies himself with schemes for the improvement of others. The idealism may be commendable in principle; but we would all find ourselves wishing that such people would hold in abeyance their desire

DECLASSIFIED

to save humanity until they had gone home and cleaned themselves up and put their own affairs in order and ceased to be a problem to themselves and everybody around them. So it is with a nation. Its first obligation is to itself: to the cleanliness and orderliness and decency of its own national life. A nation which is meeting its problems, and meeting them honestly and creditably, is not apt to be a problem to its neighbors. And, strangely enough, having figured out what it wants to do about itself, it will find that it has suddenly and mysteriously acquired criteria, which it did not have before, for knowing what to do about its relations with others. But a nation which attempts to go in for world improvement as an end in itself is not going to be apt to do much good to anybody else and it is going to find itself in the realm of perpetual confusion in trying to decide what to do about foreign policy.

Whoever would determine national interest in the foreign field must begin, then at home and he must satisfy himself about the higher national purpose, of which foreign policy can only be a function. If he does that, he has something to go on. And it is for this reason that anyone who is pressed to define national interest in terms of our international relations, as I am this evening, has a right to say: "Tell me what we Americans are trying to be to ourselves, and I will tell you what we ought to try to be to other people."

Now I don't want to expatiate about this problem of the over-all national purpose. Who can say with any authority what it is? It is not what I think -- it is not what you think individually -- it is not even what the President thinks as an individual. It is the sum total of what all of us think -- it is the consensus of our thought -- and it finds expression in our behavior as citizens and in the behavior of the representatives we send to Washington.

But I think we might recall at this point certain things about our American system. This system was founded on the belief that the civil organization of society exists for the individual and not vice versa. Government exists, according to the Declaration of Independence, in order to secure to the individual citizen certain rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which it is assumed he requires in order to pursue private purposes believed to be worth while. Government is regarded here as only the purveyor, and the guarantor, of these rights. It is not regarded as the channel through which the ultimate purposes are to be pursued. There is an assumption that the worth-while things of life will flow from the natural processes of private interest; it is the function of government to see to it that the flood gates are kept open and the channels clear through which the stream of private interest can flow and to do this by protecting the rights and the freedoms of the individual.

DECLASSIFIED

The Declaration of Independence says that man has the right to life. But it does not tell him how to live this life. The Declaration says he has a right to liberty -- the right, that is, to be free. But there is no freedom in the abstract. There is only a freedom from something and to something. The Declaration does not specify what people shall be free to do; to what ends they should use their freedom. Finally, the Declaration says man has a right to the pursuit of happiness. But it does not attempt to define what constitutes happiness for the individual. Our system has been predicated thus far on the belief that the individual is capable of knowing these things for himself, and that if he is secured in his rights and guarded from the danger of infringement on the rights of others, he will know how to pursue these aims. In this way the purposes of society are expected to flow of themselves from the individual will and conscience and from the initiatives that the individual may take. And the duty of government, I reiterate, is primarily to stand guardian over the rights which are to make all this possible.

Now these philosophical concepts of Government, as we noted yesterday, are being sorely tested and buffeted by the realities of the time; and perhaps, since change is the immutable law of nature, they will have to undergo eventually some sort of adjustment to meet the requirements of the day -- an adjustment whereby a higher value would be assigned to the collective activities of man, and a lower one to his purely private undertakings -- an adjustment whereby the national purpose, as embodied and expressed in the work of government, would come to be more widely recognized as an independent and important theatre of man's strivings and achievements. Should such things come to pass, then I could imagine that our concept of what we are doing in international affairs might be somewhat altered.

But none of this has yet taken place -- or very little. What we teach in our schools is still the rational-liberal political philosophy, not materially altered since the day of Jefferson: the philosophy of the watch-dog government, the guardian of private interest, operating by regulatory statute and held to this limited role by various checks and balances. It is not the philosophy of the purposeful government, operating by flexible administrative control, designed as the vehicle, rather than the mere guardian, of the vital processes of society.

I said these concepts of government were being tested and buffeted by the realities of the day. I want to emphasize this point. Let us never forget that our system of government is still an experiment. Lincoln described civil war of his own day as a contest which was to determine whether any such system as our own -- any system "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" -- could long survive; he did not regard that question as one which had been answered, even after 87 years of independence. I think he viewed the Civil War as something which would determine whether the

DECLASSIFIED

system was to survive the crisis of that particular time or whether it was to break up then and there. I am sure he did not think of it as the last and final test. And I think he would agree, if he were alive now, that in this year 1951 the greatest of those remaining tests has not yet come, although it is not far off. He would still see it as Bryce foresaw it and described it fifty years ago -- as something "looming on the horizon, and now no longer distant, a time of mist and shadows, wherein dangers may lie concealed whose form and magnitude America can scarcely yet conjecture." It is the test Tocqueville had in mind when he was here in this country in the 1830's and marvelled at the vitality of American institutions in the simple conditions of that day. And yet, he said: "One has to return into oneself, to struggle against the current, to perceive that such simple and logical institutions would not suit a great nation which needs a strong internal government and a fixed foreign policy."

On every side of us we see the proof of this thesis that our American civilization is still something experimental, unfinished, not fully tested. We see it in our failure to bring our lives into balance with the natural resources of this continent; we see it in our failure, to date, to find a happier and more orderly answer to the problems of labor and wages and prices; we see it in the depressing and flimsy aspect of great portions of our sprawling big cities; we see it in the pathetic shallowness and passiveness of our recreational habits; we see it in our bewilderment as to how to handle the forces which modern technology has released among us -- the telephone, the automobile, the television sets, atomic energy, the forces which Henry Adams described in 1907 as ones which grasped man's wrists and "flung him about as though he had hold of a live wire or a run-away automobile." In all these things there stands written the reminder that our society has not yet passed its final test, and that we cannot yet claim for it, whatever may be our hopes or our faith, any final validity as the answer to the problems of political organization here or elsewhere on this planet.

That being the case, we must preserve a certain modesty about what we conceive to be our role on the stage of international affairs. We have no right to recommend our institutions to others -- not only that: we have no right to expect others to understand entirely what it is we are doing here in this country; and by the same token -- not having yet finally demonstrated to ourselves the permanent validity of our own system -- we have no right to be too emphatic or critical in our views about the validity of others. The whole nature of our national development here at home tells us not to become too ambitious in our ideas about intimacy with other peoples, but rather to lay upon ourselves the restraint of one who goes his own way out of his own conviction, realizing that he has not yet proven his reasons for doing so and that in the eyes of others he may appear a species of "queer duck", and asking only that others reserve judgment on what he is doing and leave

DECLASSIFIED

him alone to do it, as long as he, in turn, minds his own business and does not step on their toes.

If you take this view, as I am free to say that I do, you conclude that the greatest thing America can do for this world is to make a success of what it is doing right here on this continent and to bring itself to a point where its own internal life is one of harmony and stability and self-assurance; and that the fundamental interest of our Government in international affairs is to assure that we should be permitted, as a people, to continue this Pilgrim's Progress toward a better America under the most favorable possible conditions, with a minimum of foreign interference, and also with a minimum of inconvenience or provocation to the interests of other nations. Concluding this, you do not hold that we have an obligation to assure the morality of domestic or international conduct elsewhere in the world, except where it affects this duty to ourselves. You do not hold that we have a responsibility to try to prevent economic hardship or to alter living standards elsewhere in the world, except, again, where the existence of poverty and misery might really interfere with what we are trying to do here. You do not regard this country as the policeman or the guardian of other peoples' liberties, except where the loss of those liberties would really threaten damage to our own. In particular, you distrust such generalizations as "world leadership;" and you shudder at the idea that this century should be considered, for the world at large, "the American century." It's a big world, bigger than we think. Our shoulders are broad; but they are not broad enough to bear all its miseries and its iniquities. Our own miseries and iniquities would be an ample load if we were to acknowledge them and shoulder them as we ought to.

Now I know what's in your minds at this point. You will say: all right we are supposed to go ahead with our domestic life here at home, and the rest will flow from that. That sounds fine in theory, but what do you do about the Russians and world communism? Suppose they don't leave us any chance to do these things? Suppose their threatening behavior is already rippin: the stuffings out of this domestic life of ours -- twisting business out of shape, causing shortages, threatening financial stability, disrupting educational patterns? Are you telling us to ignore these things? to go our own way as though none of this existed? is this isolationism? The answer to

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

these questions is "no". I recognize these things; and I think I know something about the bitterness and seriousness of the problem of Soviet Communism. I know that we are on the spot. Of course we have to resist and defend our interests in such a time and such a situation. But what I am concerned with here is the spirit and concept within which we do all that; and what we expect to get out of it. What I am afraid of is that we may get unrealistic and exalted ideas about what it is we can expect to achieve. If our policies of resistance to Russia are successful (and this goes whether there is a war or not) I think that the best we can hope is there will be no major war and that within some years this will be a somewhat easier world to live in -- one in which we will not have to devote quite so much attention to defending ourselves from external dangers. I think all these things are relative. I do not think we can ever hope to have a situation in which such a country as Russia will not be a problem for us. That goes for other countries, too. I don't think we can ever expect to get this contrary and restless outside world, so to speak, out of our hair. And my plea is that if we are going to resist threats to our security, we do just that: we take them as they come, and deal with them as they come. We don't kid ourselves into thinking that just because we coped successfully with one problem at one moment we are going to be immune from other ones rising in the next moment; we don't assume that the only world we can live in is a perfect one and we recognize that no matter how impressive is the external threat, it is never impressive enough to absolve us from our duty to ourselves and to the improvement of our national life.

And it is in this connection that I want to hoist my second warning flag. It would be this: the national interest does get consist in abstractions. And we will not get closer to it if we try to think in abstractions.

What do we mean by peace? Is it just an absence of international violence? Does it just mean that there should be no violence across borders, no violence between peoples? God forbid. You can have that sort of peace very easily. All you need is non-resistance. That sort of peace prevails today in the Kremlin's satellite area. It prevails, in fact, in any good prison -- in any good concentration camp. There can be various reasons why people refrain from fighting, and not all of them ones which contribute to our national interest.

Well, you may say, that's all right; but what we mean is a just peace. My friends, that, again, is a fine idea, within limits. But beware of carrying it to extremes. Beware of the assumption that in every one of the quarrels which wreck the lives of other peoples in this world there is always distinguishable some moral issue -- that there is always some party which is "right" and another party which is "wrong" by our standards. If that were the case, the conduct of foreign policy would be much easier than it is. Too often you will find hatred pitted against hatred, error against

DECLASSIFIED

error, treachery against treachery. Whoever enters into these unhappy depths looking for right and wrong will find himself wandering in the vale of total confusion and frustration.

And we cannot wholly solve this problem by making procedure the criterion by establishing juridical concepts which will always tell us which acts of a foreign state are moral and which are not moral. International law and practice are useful and necessary. But there are no lawyer clauses strong enough to contain at all times the deeper impulses of national aspirations and to tell us infallibly who is right and who is wrong when trouble develops between great peoples.

The causes of international conflict are sometimes too profound and too complex to be embraced just by an answer to the question "who started it." Nor is this question always susceptible to accurate or adequate determination.

We have only to remember that if you try to decide what is international morality by finding out who struck the first blow you might have some difficulty in reconciling the Spanish-American war with the American conscience.

And this is not all. The effort to get at the sources of international instability by legal definition and legal inhibition affecting the conduct of governments in the international fields has no clearly-defined relation to one of the greatest sources of instability in human affairs: namely the field of civil conflict, civil unrest, violence and contention within the national borders: dispute over who shall be considered the government capable of speaking for a country in the international field. It is idle to say that international stability is not affected by civil conflict. It is idle to say that there is any arbitrary line by which civil conflict can be separated from international war. Great civil conflicts and revolutions radiate their powers, both beneficial and poisonous, to the surrounding peoples and become in themselves sources of danger or promise to those who live abroad. We cannot say, therefore, that world peace would be achieved just by people living up to their promise not to march across other peoples' borders. I am not saying that there is no place for juridical rules in the lives of nations. I am saying that there are limits to the purposes which such rules can be expected to serve. For some of us, these are harsh words. They take us into the deepest realms of doubt about many of the things we are accustomed to admire and to take for granted. Must we despair, then, of the effort to achieve this thing we call world peace? Must we conclude that there is no such thing as good and evil in world affairs? that we are in a bear pit with wild beasts and that the only question is: who has the sharpest teeth and claws? I think not. I think that this would be to despair of ourselves as well as others. We may not be able to inhibit all international violence, or to alter the nature of human beings and their national societies. But we still have many significant choices. We must have enough faith in our purposes and our judgment, enough confidence in ourselves, to make these choices in accordance with what we believe to be useful in this world, and what not useful. We must be capable of determining wherein lies our interest--

DECLASSIFIED

our national interest -- in the course of events outside our borders, and then follow that determination. If our purpose is rooted in self-respect and restraint, and if our conduct is moderate and considerate of others, we need have no fear that our national interest will be out of accord with the interests of the world community in general.

But what we cannot do is to measure our national interest against abstractions. We cannot permit ourselves to think of world peace only in static or in legalistic terms. We cannot permit ourselves to think of it only negatively, in terms of the things we do not wish to have happen. We cannot permit ourselves to day-dream about a peaceful world, in which all manifestations of the "old Adam in man" would have been somehow suppressed under a deference to juridical norms. This sort of a world, even if we could have it, would resemble too much an international Antarctica, in which there would be no germs because there was no growth, in which there would be no sickness because there were no people, in which all would be silence, silence and peace, because there was no life.

Peace is not always, or at least not only, the absence of violence. It is not the observance of legalities. The Norwegian writer Bjoernsen said: "Peace is not the absence of war; peace is to want something. And that something must be something alive, something growing, something relative." Peace means influencing our world environment in a series of specific situations in ways that we honestly believe to be compatible with our duty to ourselves and contributory to the growth of dignity and decency in world affairs, not to their decline. And there are times when it can itself be a matter of battle and struggle, perhaps even of violence.

So much for the second thing which national interest is not. Now for the third. National interest is not primarily a question of purpose or of objective; it is a question of method. It is a question of the "how" rather than the "what". This is not to say that we do not have an interest as a nation in what we do and in what results stem from our action; but I would submit that we have a greater interest still, a primary interest, in how we do those things which we feel ourselves obliged to do or cannot keep away from doing.

Remember that none of us can really see very far ahead in this turbulent, changing, kaleidoscopic world of foreign affairs. A study of the great decisions of national policy in the past leaves the historian impressed with the difficulty of analysing the future clearly enough to be able to make really reliable calculations of the consequences of national action. It also reveals that too often the motives of national action are ones dictated for government by developments outside of its control. Its freedom of action, in these cases, lies only in the choice of method -- in the how rather than the what.

Let no one underestimate the importance in this life of the manner in which a thing is done. It is surprising how few acts there are, in individual

DECLASSIFIED

life, which are not acceptable if they are carried out with sufficient grace and self-assurance and above all with dignity and good manners and with respect for the feelings and rights of others. I would say that these rules alone, if consistently applied, would save a man or a nation from at least two thirds of the worst mistakes they might otherwise make. On the other hand, there are few acts, however commendable in purpose, which cannot be rendered unacceptable and unfortunate in their results if carried out in the wrong way, with the neglect of these principles.

And I would remind you that this question of method affects not only the outward consequences of our acts, but it has the deepest and most important effect on ourselves. Our life is so strangely composed that the best way to make ourselves better seems sometimes to be to act as though we were better; and the man who makes it a point to behave with consideration and dignity in his relations with others, regardless of his inner doubts and conflicts, will suddenly find that he has achieved a great deal in his relations with himself. The tenor and manner of our behavior toward others, as a nation, is therefore going to have an important effect on the character of our development here at home.

For these reasons we would do well to learn to think of the conduct of foreign affairs as a problem of style even more than of purpose. Where purpose is dim and questionable, form comes into its own. There are situations in this world in which good manners and proper modalities of action, while they may seem to be an inferior means of salvation, may be the only means of salvation we have at all. This is my reason for maintaining that if national interest relates to our purpose in world affairs, it relates more importantly to the dignity and propriety of our conduct — to the methods by which we pursue those aims which necessity, public feeling, and good judgment press upon us.

Today, of course, we face a world of which I think it fair to say that it is more troubled and more complicated, more potentially dangerous to us, than any we have ever known. And the dangers are not only outside ones but are in part within ourselves. What lessons would this view of national interest, which I have outlined here this evening, hold for us in the light of the problems which are crowding in upon us today?

I would say that the first lesson it holds for us is the necessity of a realistic appraisal at all times of the danger that confronts us. We are all steamed up about a possible Soviet attack. It is right that we should prepare for all eventualities and be able to deal with them if they come. Perhaps we will be faced with such an attack. But we do not know that for sure. So far, Russia has attacked no one with her own forces since the recent war; and those who know most about her intentions feel that it would be no less foolish to stake our future on a certainty that Russia means to go to war than to stake it on a certainty that she does not mean to. We simply do not know. The only thing we do know is that to act as though war were inevitable, and unavoidable, when we have no proof of that assumption, is the best way to substantiate the

DECLASSIFIED

Soviet thesis that we are aggressors and are planning war ourselves, and the best way to bring war nearer to us. Let us reckon with the possibility that war may come and let us be prepared accordingly; but let us not roll our souls to that prospect. For if we do, it will almost certainly become reality; and we shall never be able to be sure that we did not have a part in bringing it to pass.

Secondly, some of us in Government find ourselves being reproached for not "getting mad" and for not adding our voices to the thundering assertions of anger and indignation with which the air is already full. I hope we will never yield to those pressures. The public would be well advised not to listen to the people who strain in that direction. One of the prerequisites for dealing successfully with the sort of problem we have before us today in the form of Soviet communism is an ability to keep cool and to rise above petty irritation. Dealing successfully with the pressures of Bolshevism is like tennis or any form of contest that requires cool nerves -- rage doesn't help; the adversary has ways of taking advantage of it.

Let us repudiate, therefore, these easy reactions. Let us repudiate idle invective and empty gestures and pinpricks. These are only forms of petulance and self-indulgence. Let us reserve our power for the things that are really necessary and the things that can really advance our interests. We can have our emotions, and we can have our conviction that those who are now agitating the world with their irresponsible and provocative actions, and I am thinking here of the Chinese communists, will live to regret this unnecessary resort to violence, these childish tantrums, and this reckless squandering of the good-will of the American people. But it will be actions -- wise, temperate, well-chosen actions, for which the end is in sight before the beginning is made -- which will determine the outcome -- not words or breast-beating or saber-rattling or storming around.

Next, in our dealings with friendly nations, and particularly with those who find themselves most closely associated with us in world affairs, let us be fair and tolerant in this difficult moment. It is the mark of real self-assurance, the sign of inner strength, to be conciliatory and respectful and understanding of the neighbor's point of view. There is no uglier tendency in American nature than the quickness to moral indignation and to wild suspicions of bad faith which many of us display when other people do not think as we do. These questions which are now agitating international life are ones about which there are deep and troubled differences of opinion among us here at home. Is it surprising, then, that other nations, which have different interests and outlooks, should not see them just as we do? When I see the shallow self-righteousness with which many of us condemn our closest friends for taking different views of world realities than we do in matters which are admittedly questions of judgment and opinion, I cannot help but hear again the well-known admonition of Cromwell to the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland: "Is it therefore infallibly agreeable to the word of God, that which you say? I beseech you, by the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

DECLASSIFIED

And finally, my friends, if we succeed in laying upon ourselves this forebearance and restraint in our dealings with the nations we are trying to collaborate with, let us then see whether we cannot find a little of it left for our dealings with ourselves. You know and I know that this country rings from end to end today with angry voices charging all sorts of failings and iniquities, eager to smash not only the reputations but the public usefulness of people, over these questions of foreign policy and national interest. Is it impossible for us to get it into our heads that we are dealing with an extremely complicated environment; that the choices are not simple, are not obvious; that none of us is capable of seeing very clearly all that is involved; and that for that reason not a single one of us has the right to certainty or to self-righteousness and to uncharitableness toward others who do not think as he thinks? I have been in Washington, and I have been in and out of this business of the formulation of foreign policy for years on end; and I do not know one person in a responsible position in the Government of the United States who is not animated in these dark days by the most earnest, and in many instances anguished, sense of devotion to the interests of this country of ours. Who has the right to treat these men as reprobates or criminals because he does not agree with them? The air has been full of charges of dereliction toward the interests of this country; but I tell you that I know of no greater dereliction from duty to the American people in this day and age than to be quick to undermine their faith in the decency and good will and patriotism of other Americans over matters of opinion so deeply problematical that only almighty God could be sure He had the right answers. You can listen day in and day out to these disputes about the merits of this policy or that, and you will never be able to be entirely sure as to who is right and who is wrong, for only time will tell; but there is one man you may depend upon it is wrong, and that is the man whose mind is pre-occupied, and whose voice is hoarse, with destructive criticism and fulminations and accusations against others.

I would plead, then, -- if you will -- for concepts of national interest more modest than those with which we are accustomed to flatter our sensibilities, but for a greater dignity and quietness and self-discipline in the implementation of those concepts. I would plead, particularly at this genuinely crucial moment in American history, for cool nerves and a clear eye, for the husbanding of our strength, and for an iron self-discipline in refusing to be provoked into using that strength where we cannot see some plausible and reasonably promising end to what we are beginning. I would plead for the restoration of a sense of comradeship and tolerance in our public life and public debates, and for a recognition of the fact that Americans may be wrong without being evil, and that those wrong ones may even conceivably be ourselves.

If we can achieve these things we need not be too exacting in our demands for a definition of national interest. We will then have done the best we can do to bring the world closer to that state of understanding to which this Centennial celebration has been devoted: an understanding based necessarily more on respect than on intimacy, but fortified by mutual restraint and moderation, and all the more durable and serviceable for its modesty of concept. Therein -- not in the world of hatred or of intolerance or of vainglorious pretense -- lies the true glory and the true interest of this nation.